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SCRIPTURAL SUBJECTION

TO

3
CIVIL GOVERNMENT;

IN AN ADDRESS TO

REAL CHRISTIANS.

By THOMAS SHERATON.

A SECOND IMPRESSION,

With some Additions and Corrections.

*Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and
unto God, the things which are God's.*

Matt. xxii. 21.

L O N D O N:

Sold by J. MATHEWS, No 18, Strand; G. TERRY, No 54, Paternoster-
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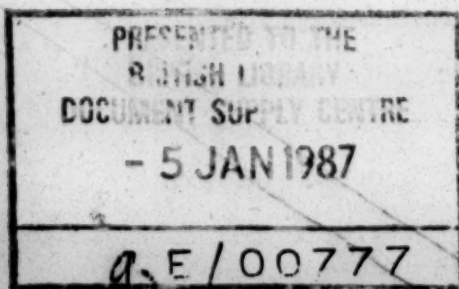
1795.

TO THE READER.

The first impression of the following pages was published at the request of a Christian friend, and attached to a piece of his own, entitled "Thoughts on the Peaceable and Spiritual Nature of Christ's kingdom." Since which, by the advice and encouragement of some other friends, they are now presented to the public separately, with some corrections and additions.*

Should the writer's motives for publishing on this subject be inquired into—he has to say, that at a time when the loyalty of Dissenters in general was doubted, he accepted an invitation and opportunity of announcing openly that he was not amongst that class of non-conformists, who scruple not to revile the good constitution under which Divine Providence has happily placed them; reserving at the same time the important distinction between a good constitution, and those corruptions that may exist in its administration, to point out which he conceives would be as much beyond his ability as foreign to his duty to attempt it. To the above consideration he also added the pleasing hopes of being found useful to such humble and candid Christians as are willing to receive instructions and admonitions in cases where the attempts are but feeble, yet scriptural and well meant.

* The above pamphlet may be purchased separately at the places where this is sold.



In error -

returned to

H&SS. 9 January 1987

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SCRIPTURAL SUBJECTION TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

1 Pet. ii. 17.

Fear God: Honour the King.

THE fear of God, according to the sense of the sacred scriptures, sometimes imports a dread and awe of his divine majesty, as the sovereign of heaven and earth, of life and of death; who giveth life to all, and whose prerogative alone it is to take it away: “I kill, and I make alive, I wound, and I heal; “neither is there any that can deliver out of my “hands.”—Deut. xxxii. 39, 40, 41.

But the fear of God has for its object not merely the destruction of the body by natural death, for after he hath killed the body he hath also power to cast into hell. Thus runs the solemn exhortation of the Lord of Life to his disciples in the days of his tabernacling here below. “Fear him, who after he hath “killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say, fear “him.”—Luke xii. 5. This species of fear was suited to preserve from apostasy, and to guard the disciples against the fear of man.

In general, however, the fear of God enjoined upon christians implies a filial regard to him, which includes the esteem and reverence due from a son to

a father; and, from the consideration of this relationship subsisting, God reasons with his people thus: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master; "if then I be a father, where is mine honour?"—Malachi, i. 6.

The fear therefore which includeth and is connected with a due reverence and esteem for God, must be peculiar to the sons of God, and is the effect of his own power in the great work of regeneration, or the new birth, by which we become the sons and heirs of God through Christ.

The exertion of divine power in this important work is independent of the will of man in every point of view, by which he might claim any merit in his own conversion: "Of his own will begat he us, "with, or by, the word of truth, that we should be "a kind of first fruits of his creatures."—Jam. i. 18. * The fear of God thus implanted in our hearts, is the great and distinguishing privilege of the new covenant, by which its transcendant excellency above the old is fully manifested, and redounds much to the praise and glory of the grace of God. The fear of God, inculcated simply by the tenor of the old covenant, given at Sinai, gendered to bondage; but

* I mean not that men are made to believe contrary to their choice, but ask by what power is it that we choose the gospel, which we naturally hate? Is it not God that shews us our perishing state as sinners, and at the same time presents the food of life to our view? So that as starving souls we eat both from choice and of necessity.

that which the new covenant teaches gives liberty and life, and leads us to cry, Abba Father, as the consequence of receiving the spirit of adoption.—Gal. iv. 4, 5, 6. 24.

The promise of the new covenant is as follows:—

“ I will give them one heart and one way, that they
 “ may fear me for ever : I will make an everlasting
 “ covenant with them, that I will not turn away from
 “ them to do them good ; but I will put my fear in
 “ their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.”—
 Jer. xxxii. 39, 40.

Brethren, the fear of God, taken in these two senses, then, will, in our experience, be found to answer every valuable purpose for which he hath appointed it, both as it respects the glory of his own name and our eternal good. For whilst the latter secures our obedience, arising from a sense of his mercy, goodness, and loving-kindness to us in the Son of his love ; the former guards us against trampling upon his sacred laws and ordinances, from a fear of its consequence, which is eternal death. The wisdom of God is conspicuous in the appointment of it ; as these two species of fear so wonderfully answer to our fallen state both of mind and frame, in this world of temptation, sin, and misery.

Do we, from an evil heart of unbelief, presume to depart from his laws and ordinances ? Then God appears as the Avenger of his holiness, and sets before us the awful consequences of wilfully sinning against him ; so that if we are his sons, we shall tremble

whilst we listen to such as the following scriptures:
 “ How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation—Heb. ii. 3:” “ For if we sin wilfully after
 “ that we have received the knowledge of the truth,
 “ there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a
 “ certain fearful looking for of judgment,” &c.—
 Heb. x. 26, 27.

Are we walking in all the commandments of the Lord blameless, and thus enjoying the light of his countenance? still we must fear him, but it is in the filial sense; for the psalmist says, “ Blessed is the man
 “ who feareth the Lord alway;” which cannot mean, that we are always to fear his wrath, but that we constantly reverence and esteem him as the Father of mercy and the God of all grace. In this sense, the apostle to the Philippians enjoins that they should work out their own salvation with fear and trembling; adding, for theirs and our consolation, that
 “ it is God who worketh in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—See ii. 12, 13.

This fear is therefore that of a son, not of a slave. It is the beginning of heavenly wisdom, and keeps us in the path of life. It is the principle by which the Lord maintains a near correspondence or communion with his people. To such he has promised to look,
 “ even to them that are poor and of a contrite spirit,
 “ and who tremble at his word.”—See Isaiah lxvi. 2. Psalm xxxiv. 18.

If then we thus fear God, and are the subjects of the new covenant, we are called upon to attend with
 reverence

reverence unto the apostolic exhortation, to "honour
 "the king in connexion with our fear of God."
 We are more particularly to attend unto this duty at
 a time like this, when many are disposed to speak
 evil of the king and of those in authority, amongst
 whom are found even those who profess the christian
 name.

If it be admitted that this is at all a proper subject
 of christian exhortation, certainly it is a seasonable
 time for it now; and in attempting this, I shall pur-
 sue the following method:

First, Prove that the fear of God here enjoined
 is inseparably connected with our rendering due
 subjection to supreme magistracy, or honouring the
 king. And,

Secondly, Show in what respects we are to honour
 the king.

Thirdly, In a negative sense, proving that in some
 particulars we ought not to honour him. And,

In the last place, inquire, whether christians have
 any authority from scripture to meddle with matters
 of politics? Concluding with some general remarks
 from the whole.

First, To prove that the fear of God enjoined in
 the text is connected with honouring the king.

This is evident from the context (see verse 13), in
 which Peter exhorts us to "submit ourselves to every
 "ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether
 "it be to the king as supreme," that is, highest in
 authority in civil matters, "or unto governors, as

“ unto them that are sent by him for the punish-
“ ment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that
“ do well.”

The great apostle Paul, in writing to the Romans, bears testimony to the same doctrine, and exhorts christians to the exercise of this branch of the fear of God, and in such strong terms as ought to rouse the attention of all who call themselves Christ's disciples.

Not one of them is exempted from the duty; no place or age in which we live can unbind us from the sacred obligation, or make void the following unalterable law:—“ Let every soul be subject to the
“ higher powers; for there is no power but of God;
“ the powers that be are ordained, ordered of God.
“ Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth
“ the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall
“ receive to themselves damnation: for rulers are
“ not a terror to good works, but to the evil.
“ Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do
“ that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the
“ same: for he is the minister of God to thee for
“ good. But if thou do that which is evil, be
“ afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for
“ he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute
“ wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye
“ must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also
“ for conscience sake.”—See Rom. xiii. 1—5.

Is it not then evident from these passages, that to honour the king, and patiently submit to the higher powers,

powers, is positively connected with the fear of God inculcated in the text * ?

Christians are not called upon to bow to the name king, or to hold his person as sacred who possesses this title. This principle would, in some cases, blend the christian system with the Jewish; a thing quite inconsistent with its nature and genius.

In the Jewish religion, or old dispensation, when the king was anointed with holy oil, and considered as the head of the Jewish church, and a type of Christ the anointed of God; his person might then be esteemed sacred, being thus set apart for the religious service of God—But surely, since the coming of Christ, and the abrogation of Jewish rites, no gentile prince can with propriety think himself the Lord's anointed, or claim to himself the title of sacred majesty. But if by sacred majesty we are taught to understand the inviolability of the king's person, there can be no objection to the use of such a phrase.

* It must however be acknowledged by every candid christian, that both these apostles describe the qualities of governors as answering the end of their office. Such are sent of God for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. They are ministers of God to us, not for evil; but for good. They are revengers to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil, consequently to resist such, must incur the divine displeasure, which if persevered in will certainly terminate in the everlasting destruction of the soul. At the same time we must affirm that it is the duty of christians to obey the higher powers, in cases when those in authority are extremely wicked in their conduct, and even unjust in ruling, so long as it is the will of a nation to retain such in their office.

It

It does not appear from scripture that government by a king is appointed of God in preference to other forms, if we reflect how it was that Israel of old had the first king: but as the government of kings and emperors was generally prevalent in those days in which Christ came, and in which the apostles wrote their epistles to christians, this is perhaps the only reason that can be given why christians are called upon to honour kings in particular, because they were chief in authority, and were principally the powers that then existed by the Lord's providence. If Christ and his apostles had lived under a representative or republican form of government, there is no reason to doubt but they would have exhorted christians to honour and obey those in authority by delegation.

The honours therefore due to a king, are partly founded on the office he sustains, which invests him with supreme power, and partly on the justness of his administration, but not on any particular form of governing abstracted from the great ends of it, which is for the punishment of the wicked, and for protecting the innocent. Without the important article of ruling well, our obligation to honour kings, and those in authority over us, are proportionally weakened, but cannot be entirely superseded till a nation has determined to change its ruling powers.

The apostle in ver. 7 of the last cited chapter certainly thus discriminates, in exhorting christians to "Render unto all their due; fear to whom fear, and honour to whom honour." Surely we cannot

then, consistently with this injunction, say that to a tyrant is due the same degree of honours as to a gentle and merciful prince, whose conduct in ruling is productive of those blessings for which government was first instituted.

But some imagine, and zealously as falsely assert, that none but those whom they suppose a christian king ought to be honoured and sincerely obeyed. The confusion, however, and disorder necessarily resulting from such a doctrine, would at once prove it not to be of divine origin: on the contrary, we see, and ought to admire, in this, as in a thousand other instances, the wisdom displayed in the scriptures in not grounding our subjection to kings upon any such principle; for then must a king be a compound of every thing that wears the name christian, amongst the many opposite sects that assume that venerable title, ere he could justly claim, or be able to obtain, an universal allegiance from his subjects. The office of a king, and christianity in its own nature, are totally distinct things and unconnected, as much so as a lawyer and christian; but we scruple not to say, that if either or both are christians, they will be so much the better for it, in the exercise of their respective duties.

Wherever the supreme power of government is lodged; whether in one man; in twenty; or if in a whole nation or empire, by its representatives or delegates; or whether they be called christians or heathen governors; such a power is, by christians, to be

be obeyed, because it then becomes an appointment or ordinance of God, intended for the good of the whole mutually.

And hence we are exhorted, as in the passage already cited, to "submit to every ordinance of man*" "for the Lord's sake;" not religious ordinances, but the inspired writer means, every constitution formed by the general consent of men; and which being agreed to, and invested in one or in many persons, it immediately becomes a divine appointment as well as a human one; on which account christians are bound to obey for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him; and consequently, as these are sent or ordered of God, and raised up for the purpose of governing, they are, whoever they be, the ministers of God to us. "By him kings reign, and "princes decree justice. By him princes rule, and "nobles, even all the judges of the earth."—Prov. viii. 15, 16.

It is evident then, that christian subjection to government is not confined or limited to any one form in preference to another, otherwise it would have been mentioned in the scriptures what that form should be; nor could it have been enjoined, consistent therewith, to submit to every constitution of man,

* The phrase "every ordinance of man" is thus translated by some of the learned, ἀνθρωπινη κτισει, a human creation or constitution.

which,

which, for the reasons now given, I take to mean, any form of government established by the common consent of a nation.

And it is further evident that government is not a mere human appointment, as some imagine, but is of divine authority, designed for the good, and not the destruction of mankind.

The power and authority that Pilate, the Roman governor, had over Jesus, was from above, as he himself declares to that ruler:—Thou couldst have “no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above. Therefore, he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.” The sense of which is tolerably clear, when we consider that Pilate had before said to Jesus, that he had power either to crucify or release him. Jesus admits that he had this power, but informs him whence it was originally derived, not merely from the emperor or people at Rome, but from above, that is, from God. Considering, then, that Pilate was in the capacity of a governor in Judea, his conduct towards Jesus was, in some degree, justifiable, but those who delivered him up to Pilate did it without the least shadow of justice or reason. Therefore, says our Lord, “he who delivered me up to thee hath the greater sin.” Which comparison, however, supposes some degree of guilt in the governor, and which, in the end, appeared very conspicuous indeed; in that he suffered a person to be crucified, in whom he acknowledged there was no fault at all:—yes; he released a robber
and

and executed an innocent man: yet his power or authority, as a civil governor, was acknowledged to be from God.

And this sense of the passage exactly coincides with what we have already quoted from Paul's epistle, written to the church of God under the same government, where he says, of the then existing heathen government, that it was ordained of God. If therefore civil government be an ordinance of God, they who resist or rebel against any form of it, rebel against not men only, but against God; and in so doing, cannot be said to fear him: "for he that is per-verse in his way, despiseth him."—Prov. xiv. 2. Yet I grant if the ends of civil government be subverted by those that rule, and a nation be hurried on to complete ruin by the wickedness of those who ought to be the guardians of virtue, national resistance in such a case cannot be considered as rebellious against God, but the reverse; otherwise those blessings of civil and religious liberty which we now enjoy, and that have been transmitted to posterity as the glorious effects of the revolution of 1688, are only the fruits of unrighteousness and rebellion. But surely when we reflect on the nature of the government previous to this happy event, every christian must approve the change, and applaud the conduct of the nation in deposing James and investing William with kingly authority. If then we can approve of such a change, though at this distance of time, we might have done the same as contemporaries; and what we
approve

approve of as right in others, we may as christians in general acquiesce in ourselves, but can never take up the sword to assist in the accomplishment of any revolution whatever. In fact, the only case in which a revolution can with safety be approved of by a christian, is that which renders it totally unnecessary for him to take up arms; for when a nation is unanimous as a body to depose its tyrannical governors, or when it is perfectly ripe for a constitutional change, the malecontents must be supposed so inconsiderable in number, as to banish even the idea of violent opposition*.

That a nation may lawfully defend itself by resisting its tyrannical rulers in a certain case, is to me clear, and founded on the doctrines of the New Testament.

It cannot well be affirmed that our duty to magistrates is more strongly enforced than that which is mutually binding in the marriage state. Yet in a certain case, though otherwise indissoluble, the bond

* This was strictly the case in the revolution now alluded to, where no blood was shed, save that of a few individuals of the Dutch army in an accidental skirmish on their first landing, and when the will of the nation could not well be known: and such was the united voice of the Romans, that without opposition the sword of justice halted to pursue the affrighted and fugitive Nero, to bathe itself in that blood, which a ruined nation was groaning for, and without which it could not possibly be relieved. In such scenes the real christian has eye to God, waiting for the issue of Providence, and praying that his almighty arm may order all for the happiness of mankind, and the good of his brethren in Christ; and which indeed cannot in some cases be effected but by such revolutions. So long, however, as a nation is content with their government, so long is it the christian's duty to submit even to the oppressive yoke of evil governors.

may be broken, and the sacred injunctions to love and obey cease to be binding on the injured party.

We are exhorted to obey them that have the rule over us in spiritual things; and the subjection we owe to such is founded on the consideration that they watch for our souls as those that must give an account, &c. see Heb. xiii. 17. But if in place of watching for our souls—of feeding Christ's flock as faithful pastors, they feed themselves, and devour the sheep, we are no longer bound to obey them, but may reject them as hirelings and robbers. If then obedience to our spiritual rulers be not absolute in all cases, I do not see upon what principle it should be so to our temporal governors. Why ought they to be placed beyond the reach of conviction of guilt for their bad conduct?—why should they be so exalted in their office as to exclude from them all possible fear of forfeiting or falling from it, let their conduct be never so wicked and ruinous to their people? Certainly every tyrant will approve the doctrine; but christians should be aware how they receive doctrines that are so greedily relished by such. The New Testament is utterly a stranger to a doctrine of the like nature or tendency. In all the duties which are binding upon us by mutual contract, there is an exception in case of failures in the parties; and even when nature and grace are the ties which bind us to duty, there are exceptions. We are bound to obey our parents, and their paternal government over us is as much the appointment of God, as that of civil government

vernment over a nation. Yet none will say that a son's obedience to his father is absolute in all cases. We are bound by the most solemn ties to love our brethren in Christ, and with a love of the same kind as that wherewith Christ loved us. Yet if a brother act so contrary to the spirit of the gospel, as totally to efface the image of Christ on his soul, the very object for which we first loved him, our obligation to continue our former love to him ceases; in fine, to our God alone we owe obedience and subjection in the most absolute sense, for he is ever the same—his righteousness remaineth for ever—just and true are all his ways from everlasting to everlasting, and therefore no mortal can have the least shadow of pretence or reason for not continuing to obey and love him.

But we should here recollect how strongly the relative duties now hinted at are enforced upon us in the New Testament. The positive and active part of our duty in these relations to one another are more wanted than the negative part; and we are less inclined to the practice of the former than the latter. Experience teaches us that christians are considerably more able to shew when their teachers err, and what disqualifies them for their office, than to esteem them highly for their works sake, and to be at peace amongst themselves. The like may be observed on filial subjection, brotherly love, and of our obedience to civil rulers; which duties are more difficult to practise, than to shew that in a certain case we are not bound to perform them. And this perhaps may be one rea-

son why the New Testament scriptures are silent, in some instances, on the negative, whilst on the positive duties they are full and express, as to those governors who are a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well.

It becomes us as christians to be well understood on this subject, lest, on the one hand, our governors should deem us unwilling to render them due subjection, and on the other, lest our fellow subjects should have ground to consider our profession of christianity as unfriendly to their natural rights. But what is of vast more consequence, our duty to God and our neighbours cannot perhaps be so properly exercised without a careful distinction of this sort. For if we love God, we will love and obey them that represent him on earth, even good magistrates; and if we love mankind, it will be our earnest desire that they enjoy all the natural blessings that God has bestowed or granted to them. This is the natural effects of the gospel when we receive it in truth; yes, wherever the gospel of God's grace scatters its illuminating rays in any nation, it has a direct tendency to put men into the possession of what naturally belongs to them as rational and accountable beings to God, as well as to manifest his pardoning love to them as sinners. Upon these principles we now proceed,

Secondly, To shew in what respects we are to honour the king.

And first, We are to honour the king by praying
for

for his eternal welfare as well as temporal happiness. According to the language of scripture, "prayers, "intercessions, and giving of thanks, are to be made "for all men; for kings and all that are in authority: "for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God "our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved." 1 Tim. ii. 2. Therefore as God will have all men to be saved, that is, men of every rank and station, it is plain kings are not excluded. Hence they are an object of the christian's prayer, to the end that they, as well as other men, may obtain the salvation which is in Christ.

To honour the king in this way, is to honour him in truth and in sincerity; but not in flattery and dissimulation. When we pray for the king's salvation, it supposes him a sinner, and in a perishing state like other men, otherwise there would be no propriety in praying for his salvation. There are many flatterers round the persons of princes, especially of the ecclesiastical kind, who are ready to persuade them that the salvation of Christ wears a more benign aspect to kings than other men, as if their high office entitled them in some measure to the favour of God, and ensured their eternal salvation. But this, we see, is not the apostle's view of it; for he ranks them with other men, and gives us no authority for believing that they shall be saved in preference to the meanest peasant.

But again.—If christians are well convinced of their duty in praying for the king, not only that he may be

saved, but that they under him may live a peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, this will effectually secure their subjection to the higher powers; for it will not be easily reconciled in the mind of a christian, at one time to pray for the king's prosperity in soul and body, and that we under him may live in peace; and at another, in direct opposition to it, take part in those measures which lead to intestine broils and factions, inconsistent with real godliness, and frequently destructive of every principle of honour and honesty.

I am persuaded that any king, however wicked, must think himself highly honoured by those subjects who make it a part of their public worship to pray for him; and it does not appear, from any principle of good reasoning, that those who refuse to pray for the king in public will honour him in private, either in thought or conversation; and if this is the case with a christian, how does it appear that he fears God, as enjoined in the text?

But, by honouring the king, according to our present form of government, it implies the two houses of parliament. These are two branches of the legislative authority in this kingdom, without which there is not a supreme power; and therefore we must honour these with our prayers in connexion with the king. And if these three are to us the reigning powers, we know then to whom subjection is due.

Second, The honour which we owe to the king, and the other branches of supreme authority, ought to regulate our public and private conversation when

we are called upon to give our opinions in matters of politics. I mean, we ought to be afraid to speak evil of dignities, in contradistinction to those false christians whom Peter* says were *not afraid* to do it.—To speak evil of dignities is to rail against the government under which we are placed by the Lord's appointment; to smite it by bitter words, maliciously to defame and reproach the name and characters of those in authority over us. Such a conduct must be a direct contradiction to doing honour to the king in any sense of the word; and turns out to be not only libellous against the higher powers in this world, but of a blasphemous nature against God, whose appointment government is, and whose ministers they are who govern.

But further: in honouring the king we ought not merely to avoid the language of outrage and rebellion, but we should be careful to speak with due respect and esteem for him on account of his high office and important charge over us, and that in proportion as he rules well, even in cases when his private conduct is very immoral.

And in this view we ought to venerate both houses of parliament, as branches of the legislative authority, though composed of members whose private characters, in many instances, are extremely wicked.

And, lastly, we ought not only to speak in the language of esteem, and with reverence ourselves, for government in general, as an ordinance of God,

* 2 Pet. ii. 10.

but we ought also to avoid the company of those who are wilfully bent on speaking evil against it.

By this, however, it is not meant that christians should be dumb on every occasion, and not be at liberty to express their thoughts upon what appears to them right or wrong in those who govern: but this we must do with such tenderness, as no way to weaken either our own, or the obligation of others to submit themselves as good subjects. Christians, according to their stations, ought in a becoming manner to testify against the crying sins of their civil rulers. This was done by the ancient prophets, in whom was an excellent spirit. They reprov'd their princes openly to their face; and this in perfect consistency with subjection to them, as those invested with civil authority.

A prudent son may, with propriety, reprove a father in things that are glaringly wrong in his conduct; but it will be in such an affectionate manner, as will sufficiently indicate that he still considers the relationship to exist, and that, as a son, he ought to honour his father.

Our Lord himself reprov'd or charged sin upon Pilate, the Roman governor, who was to him as supreme in civil authority in the land of Judea; yet he submitted and paid tribute to that authority, and, as has been observed, acknowledged that Pilate's power over him was from above. The power which Pilate had over Jesus was from above, in a twofold sense. First, God had appointed that Jesus should fall a
victim

victim for our sins, under Pilate's authority; and, secondly, as civil authority is from heaven, and by the Lord's appointment, so Jesus being delivered, in the eye of the Jews, as a seditious and wicked person, Pilate as a civil ruler had a right to take cognizance of this matter.

The sin of Pilate was in not acting consistently with the nature of his office, which certainly was to protect peaceable and innocent persons; for though the Jews charged Jesus with sedition and blasphemy, yet it was false, and Pilate himself was obliged to declare that he found no fault in him at all.

Surely then, when those in authority will not protect the innocent and peaceable, they are reprehensible, and those who reprove are neither criminal before God nor man. On the contrary, it would be highly offensive to God were we, because of our professed subjection to the reigning powers, to call evil good, and good evil.

The apostle Paul, more than once, objected to and questioned the propriety of the conduct of those in authority relative to himself, yet as a christian he was always willing to suffer wrong rather than resist. At Philippi, a city of Macedonia, at that time subject to the Romans, Paul was imprisoned as a disorderly person, by the magistrates, who knew not that he was a freeman of Rome; but on hearing what God had done in the prison in favour of his servants, and being conscious of their guilt, they gave orders for his releasement, which, when Paul heard of, he thus replied: "They have beaten us openly uncondemned,

“ being Romans, and have cast us into prison, and
 “ now they do thrust us out privily: nay, verily, but
 “ let them come themselves and fetch us out.”—
 Acts xvi. 37.

In which passage we evidently see a charge of injustice and improper conduct made against the magistrates of that city. At another time we also behold this great and faithful servant of Christ pleading his legal privileges as a freeman of Rome. At Jerusalem, when about to be examined by scourging, he interrogated the centurion with great spirit; “ Is it
 “ lawful for to scourge a man that is a Roman un-
 “ condemned ?”

From which passages, and others that might be cited, we see, that as a man and citizen, this eminent apostle was ever ready to plead his rights: while at the same time, as a christian, he was always willing to suffer wrongs rather than rebel against those in authority. With safety then we may imitate these great exemplars of genuine christianity, and true piety to God.

Thirdly, We ought to honour the king by a cheerful and ready contribution towards the support of his official authority and power, by which peace and good order may be established amongst men. By which, however, we mean not to say that these blessings are peculiar to monarchical government; but as it cannot be denied that these may, and are at present, in a great measure enjoyed by us under that kind of government, it must appear to us in a more striking light to be our duty to contribute our part to-
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wards the maintenance of such important temporal advantages. It is our duty to do this even in cases when as christians we do not derive all those blessings for which government is principally appointed of God, and for which it is our wisdom highly to esteem it.

At Rome, where christians cannot be supposed to have exulted in the privileges derived from a heathen government; yet, the apostle in his epistle to the church, residing in that place, enjoins that it should pay tribute to those in authority; and for this reason, because they were God's ministers, constantly attending the professed duties of their office. "Therefore," says he, "render to all their dues; tribute* to whom tribute is due, custom† to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour."—See Rom. xiii.

The christian law is to do good unto all men, even to our enemies; and therefore, even in a case where we, on account of our religion, were deprived of every benefit resulting from government, it would still be our duty to honour that government with a part of our substance, so long as we could believe that all other subjects received real advantages from it.

Our Lord himself did not enjoy much, if any, real civil protection under the Roman governor in

* Tribute was money paid into the exchequer.

† Custom, an impost or tax upon goods or merchandise.

the land of Judea, yet for the honour of God, whose will it is that civil authority shall be established and obeyed, and for the good of mankind in general, he directs that his disciples should pay tribute to Cæsar; and to establish the vast importance of this precept in the view of his followers, we behold him working a miracle in the sea to obtain money to give for himself and Peter.—See Matt. xvii. 27. And surely it is rational as well as religious that subjects should pay for being protected; and though christians as well as other men may sometimes discern that they pay more than is absolutely necessary for their protection, yet it does not become them to find fault, especially as they are not always competent judges of the expences which attend their protection. And even when taxing increases to an oppressive degree, christians should, of all others, be the last in finding fault.

This may lead us to remark on the improper conduct of those, who both vindicate and practise smuggling, or the illegal importation of foreign goods on which is laid an impost or custom. Particularly it requires our notice, when we know it to be practised by those who profess to fear God. While they practise this, where is their fear of God, or regard to the divine and unalterable law of Jesus, “Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s?” or wherein do they honour the king as the text enjoins? If we honour him with our lips while we rob him in secret, our subjection will not prove acceptable to God, nor in the least shew that we fear him. And while, by
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this practice, we rob the king of his due, by law established, we at the same time injure the fair trader. This practice is by many thought to be of an indifferent kind, and unworthy the discussion of a christian; but when we seriously consider the things which such a practice involves in it, the supposed unimportance of the subject will then vanish, and the real christian will see, that he can neither fear God nor honour the king in maintaining such a commerce.

Fourth, We may and ought to honour the king by every external mark of respect; not the marks of superstitious reverence, but such as prove to others that we esteem him as God's minister, for the punishment of vice and the praise of them that do well. And this will include in it our respect for magistrates, as subordinate ministers for the same purposes; for it is evident, that where they are not regarded the king is not honoured, nor God feared.

The scriptures enjoin upon christians, not only to be subject to principalities and powers, but also to obey magistrates: "To be gentle, shewing all meekness to all men."—Titus iii. 1, 2.

By outward marks of respect shewed to the king and to magistrates, is to be understood an agreement and conformity to those usages and customs which men have adopted to distinguish these in their office and rank, when such customs and usages do not interfere with the authority of Christ over our consciences. One main end in such a compliance is, that we may
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put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, who are always ready either to charge christianity with disloyalty, or to be disloyal themselves.

These secretly hate that authority which lays a restraint upon their unlawful lusts and unwarrantable liberty; and for this cause they hate christianity and those who profess it, and are happy to find any flaw in their character that would most effectually expose them to the hatred of those in authority, while themselves are the real breakers of both the laws of God and men. These are the men, whose foolishness the christian conduct ought to silence, together with another class, who, while they profess to be religious, imbibe sentiments repugnant to it. They inveigh at that power and authority which affords another sect the same liberty as themselves; which power, if they themselves possessed it, would be exercised to persecute those who should take the liberty of differing from them.

Thirdly, To shew that, in some particulars, we are not to honour the king by our compliance with his appointments.—On this subject our Lord has given an universal maxim, and drawn the only proper line of distinction that can with safety be depended on, and that ought to regulate the conduct of every christian. Yea, it is such as ought effectually to silence every objection, and gain the assent of every reasonable man; “Render unto Cesar the things which are Cesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” What king, then, can reasonably expect

expect his subjects to honour him, who at the same time is unwilling that the people should honour God, and render unto him the worship due to his sacred name? Surely, if the kings of the earth are to be honoured, God above all must be honoured, and that in such a way as suits his own nature, and agrees with his own institutions. Are the kings of the earth jealous of their honour and dignity, and shall not Jehovah be jealous of his? Are they concerned to establish their kingdoms and secure the obedience of their subjects, and shall not the King of saints be concerned to establish his kingdom, which is an everlasting kingdom, and to require an universal subjection from all his people?

Here is the great distinction that every christian ought zealously to maintain in his own mind, so that whilst he honours the kings of the earth, he may not in the smallest degree mix with it the honour that is due to God only. Thus saith the prophet Isaiah on this matter; "I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images."—Chap. xlii. 8.

Hence the kings and governors of the earth can have no dominion over the consciences of men. The sovereign of the conscience is God alone, who at first formed it, and to whom alone it is accountable in matters of religion. And on this account, when the prophets of old addressed the people, they were careful to keep their own place, and direct men to give the glory to God, by saying, "Hear the word of the Lord,"

"Lord," or "Thus saith the Lord." If any men on earth ever had a right to sway the consciences of men, surely the divinely inspired apostles of Christ had; yet we find, according to the doctrine of the New Testament, that they were not lords over God's heritage, but ensamples to the flock. In this view our Lord exhorts us to "call no man father upon earth, for one is your father who is in heaven."—Matt. xxiii. 9. Before his tribunal alone we must appear to give an account of the deeds of the body, as we have been actuated either by good or bad principles. Wherefore whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto kings and councils, in matters of conscience, more than God, we must judge*.

If, then, a Nebuchadnezzar should set up an image of gold, and call upon us to worship it, shall we fall down? Or if any modern monarch should establish a national religion, and insist upon all without distinction to worship in his way, however contrary to the word of God, should we honour him in this case with our compliance? Surely not. Let us remember the conduct of Shadrach and his partners, (Dan. chap. iii.) and the goodness of God in delivering them from the fiery furnace. Suppose a Darius should make a decree, that none should pray to the true God, but that all must offer up their supplications to himself. In this case we easily see the line of our duty in the conduct of Daniel, who, notwithstanding the unalterable

* See the boldness of Peter and John, Acts iv.

decree, looked towards the holy temple at Jerusalem, and prayed three times a day to the true God.

But supposing that at present the higher powers do not require us to worship idols, nor prevent us from serving the true God as he has appointed; yet, if the civil statutes are mixed with certain religious requisitions, it is an infringement on the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and is an attack upon his authority. For instance, when we pay tithes of all we possess, who requires this at our hands? The civil and ecclesiastical authority, unnecessarily and absurdly blended together, does; but God does not. The sons of Levi had once a commandment to take tithes of the people, according to the law of God (Heb. viii. 5.); but we are not under the Levitical priesthood. That priesthood is now changed, and of course the laws of tithes is also altered; for neither were perfect, being only instituted by the law of a carnal commandment; therefore of necessity Christ was made a priest after the order of Melchisedeck, who offered up himself without spot to God, and who now prays for us in the presence of God. To him alone therefore we bring our spiritual tithes, namely, the fruit of our heart, even thanksgiving and praise, and he, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth, receiveth them.—Heb. vii. 8.

It is evident, then, that the christian is not under that dispensation, in which it was required of God to pay tithes; and consequently, to be required to pay them

them is an infringement on the liberty wherewith Christ hath made christians free. It is granted that there are other taxes which we pay without scruple, and which in the end are applied to a purpose inconsistent with christianity; but such are collected as the king's right, and for the support of civil matters, which we ought cheerfully to pay, asking no questions for conscience sake, respecting the use that is to be made of it. This however I conceive to be vastly different to a religious tax, assuming the garb and name of a Jewish ritual, and appropriated to the support of a ministry not scriptural.

Against such a Judaizing custom the friends of genuine christianity ought to bear testimony, but in such a way as ought to convince men, that our objections are not of a pecuniary nature, nor our scruples those which arise from the least disaffection to government.

In a word, whatever other cesses or taxations there may be, which professedly has for their sole object the support of religion, to be required to pay such is a violation of the liberty of conscience. Every man in the possession of full liberty of conscience, as all ought to be, should be left to himself to support, from a ready mind, that religion which he most approves of, and which he ought to do according to his ability. In this way the religion of Jesus, independent of civil authority, supports itself in every age, by the influence of his love on the hearts of those that receive the truth,
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which disposes them to give liberally of the things they possess for the support of their poor brethren, and the comfort of those who labour in word and doctrine.

But, though christians, rightly considering their duty, cannot willingly pay such religious taxations, yet they are not to resist those in authority; so that, if they are disposed to take our coat for them, let them have our cloaks also. In a case of this nature we suffer for conscience, and for the truth's sake, in which we are called to exercise patience. And here we may remark, how unreasonable and ungrateful such a conduct is in those who are invested with civil power. Its unreasonableness appears, when we reflect on the unlimited and uncontrollable authority which it is the sole prerogative of Christ to exercise over the consciences of his people, which plainly supposes the sinfulness of complying with the religious requisitions of earthly princes. It is ungrateful as well as unreasonable, for kings to insnare the consciences of Christ's subjects with their institutions and sentiments, because that he has been careful to enjoin upon all his followers universal subjection to them in those things which relate to civil government. And besides, he has also taught them to pray for every thing that can contribute towards their happiness here or hereafter. Does the king wish for eternal salvation? we will pray for it. Does he desire to live in peace and plenty here? we will put up our supplications

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for it, and cheerfully contribute our part towards it; and if we have it not in our power to add much to his dignity, we will never lift up a hand to disturb his tranquillity, or to oppose his authority. Justice and gratitude do therefore require, that christians enjoy from civil authority an unrestrained liberty of conscience, which consists not only in a freedom to worship God according to scripture, but to refuse that which is contrary to it. Which leads us next

To shew that christians are not to honour the king by complying with his appointed fasts; particularly, when such a day is connected with praying for the success of destructive arms: but we may first enquire whether they have any authority from God to appoint fasts for christians upon any occasion whatever. Some christians, from a tenderness and regard for the scripture doctrine of subjection to the higher powers, have admitted this, and affirm, that kings ought to be obeyed in the appointment of national fasts. In this, I presume, they deviate from the distinguishing maxim of Jesus, which is strikingly simple and clear, namely, that we are to "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and unto God the things which are God's." Every thing of a civil nature belongs unto Cæsar; but surely we may say with as much freedom, that every thing of a religious kind belongs unto God; therefore when religious duty is proposed, it must be stamped with

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with divine authority ere the christian conscience can be bound to comply. In civil laws there must first be a command from those in authority, before it can be the duty of subjects to obey; and so in matters of religion we must have a precept, example, or something analogous, in the word of God, to bind our consciences to duty. In the New Testament, which is the most perfect and clear light to christians, there is no command that the followers of Christ should obey a fast appointed by kings. Nor do we see any example, where the primitive christians kept any such fasts: and if the doctrine of analogy or inference be pleaded, where is the scripture whence we may conclude that christians bowed the knee to pray when kings commanded them? or what doctrine is there taught in the New Testament which implies such subjection?

The doctrine of abstinence and prayer, as delivered in the New Testament, was enjoined upon purely religious and devout occasions, and therefore we cannot well imagine that Christ intended to allow the kings of the earth the power of regulating such a duty, or to point out to christians the occasions and proper seasons for it*. Christ is the head of the church, and not the

* They fasted when any thing very great was to be done, (Matt. xvii. 21); when they ordained teachers, (Acts xiii. 3); on the occasion of some particular service to God, (See ver. 2.); at particular devout seasons, which made it lawful for husband and wife to be apart for the time, (1 Cor. vii. 5); and when they were in great trials, (2 Cor vi. 5), such as Paul was often engaged in, chap. xi. 27.

king, whose authority over subjects is not derived from the consideration of his being a christian, but because civil government is an appointment of God; and the king, on this account, is the minister of God, but not over God's spiritual sanctuary, only over the civil concerns of men.

It is too commonly supposed, that christian kings are to the national churches of those kingdoms over which they reign, what David and Solomon were to the Jewish church. And hence christian kings so called have been piously termed the Lord's anointed, at the head of the christian, as David, Solomon, &c. were at the head of the Jewish church.

To me, however, this parallel appears improperly drawn, and ought rather to stand thus: What David and Solomon &c. were for a time to the Jewish, the Lord Jesus is to the christian church in every age. The former were in the capacity of kings, prophets, or teachers over the Old Testament church, and were subject to a change because of their imperfection and mortality. The latter not only sustains the office of king and prophet, but also of priest to the New Testament church, but being absolutely perfect, and the immortal, he is not subject to mutability, but remains for ever the head of his church, and a priest after the order of Melchisedeck.—Heb. vii. Admitting that David and Solomon, &c. were at the head of the Jewish church, they certainly had authority to call a solemn assembly and appoint a national fast to be observed by a national church,

which

which was uniform in itself, and of Jehovah's own appointment. Of such a fast, by the order of these princes, we have however no instance.

In this church, which was only temporary, abounding with types, prefigurations, and shadows of good things to come (Heb. ix. 9. x. 1), politics, earthly authority, and sacred rites, were united in one mass of religion, by divine permission and appointment, and could not otherwise be in the nature of the thing, it being adapted to an earthly sanctuary (Heb. ix. 1—11), including in it, by the outward token of circumcision, both carnal and spiritual subjects or members. This worship was answerable to the nature of that religion, which an apostle affirms, “ stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, or rites and ceremonies, imposed on them until the time of reformation.”—Heb. ix. 9. But what reformation does this apostle allude to? Was it to a reformed national church, wearing the christian name, yet retaining the things in use under the old covenant, as altars, organs, bells, vestments, unctions, holy waters, and consecrated grounds, &c.? Did he cast his eyes towards a church adorned with an earthly monarch at its head, surrounded with lordly priests, exacting with rigour, as of old, their tythes? Or did he behold, at some little distance, a system of religion, entitled the christian, yet, as of old, adapting itself to suit a kingdom of unregenerate and untaught disciples, except what should lie in the outward application of water in the name of the sacred Three? If

so, we have indeed seen this time of reformation take a considerable spread in the nations of Europe, but shall be scarcely able to discern wherein the difference consists between the unreformed Jewish and the reformed national christian churches. But, brethren, the reformation to which the apostle alludes is of a different nature, and is that which Jesus himself was the author of. The time of its commencement was after he ascended to the Father's right hand, when he sent down the plentiful effusions of the Holy Spirit to instruct and qualify his disciples for the arduous task of carrying on this great work.

The constituent parts of this reformation, as described in the epistle to the Hebrews, form a very striking contrast to those of the Jewish religion; in which we have Christ the Son of God, as the leader and prophet, instead of Moses; Jesus, the eternal high priest after the order of Melchisedeck, instead of Aaron, a poor dying mortal. Jesus the one true sacrifice, who by one offering up of himself has purged away all sin, as pertaining to the conscience, instead of the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, which required to be often repeated, and, after all, only purified the outward man; in fine, we have Jesus the Son of God giving the true rest to the people of God, which Joshua the son of Nun could not do. He has entered into the heavenly Canaan above, superseding in his own person all the typical services of the Mosaic dispensation, and introducing not a worship suited to the fleshly seed of Abraham, as

such,

such, nor even to the offspring of believing parents in an unregenerate state, but that which is purely spiritual; at the head of which he hath for ever placed himself, admitting of no rival princely power whatever to share in the government of the church. All power in heaven and in earth is given unto him, Matt. xxviii. 8. He has ample authority, and unquestionable right to exercise this extensive power; for "he was before all things, and by him all things consist;" "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily." Col. i. 17.—ii. 9. He also possesses in himself wisdom sufficient to direct his great power to infinitely good purposes, and adequate to the important office of governing the church in every age, till time shall be no more; for, "in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." His almighty power, then, and unsearchable wisdom, thus connected, shall, in the end, make all things, both in heaven and in earth, redound to his own glory and the good of his people, who are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and power (Col. ii. 3, 10; ch. i. 18); the head of the body, the church.

How vain, then, are the attempts of earthly monarchs, when they exert the feeble arm of civil authority to promote the interests of an invisible, spiritual, and heavenly kingdom, which can only be supported by the omnipotent hand of God! How unjust their claims, and incompetent their wisdom, to be head over his church, and to share any part of the

government over her, in appointing her fasts, her solemn prayers, and the bounds of her religious liberty!

Yes, brethren, we have seen the assuming hand of civil authority exalting itself, in conjunction with a supposed ecclesiastical power, to set aside the laws of Christ, and make them give place to their own institutions. But our friendship to Jesus is known only by our attachment to his laws, and which stand opposed to the friendship of this world: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."—John xv. 14.

In religious matters we cannot serve too masters; we must hold the authority of Christ over our consciences by his word, independent of any earthly prince or power whatever, that, as did the Thessalonians, when we receive the word of God, in the scriptures, we may receive it, not as the word of men, nor under the fear and authority of the civil magistrates, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh in those that believe.—1 Thes. ii. 13.

We presume, therefore, that the civil powers have no right even to enforce genuine christianity, were they so disposed*. A right to enforce it supposes some proper authority to bind the minds of men, which is inconsistent with the pure and unmixed authority

* To countenance and recommend genuine christianity would indeed be highly praise-worthy in our civil rulers, and could
not

authority of God over the conscience; for, according to this doctrine, it would then be our duty not only to obey God, but also the king, in matters of religion. It would then be our duty to receive the gospel not as the word of God only, but also as the word of men.

Conversion to real christianity would thus consist, not solely in the exertion of almighty and spiritual energy in the belief of the gospel, but partly by the power of carnal weapons in the hand of earthly authority, obliging the sinner to give credit to the word of God. Being thus compelled to come in, according to the literal meaning of that phrase, the church of God would then be filled with men, under the countroul of a carnal mind, answerable to the weapons with which they were regenerated.

If, then the civil powers have no right to enforce genuine christianity by any other means than that which it is the duty of the meanest subject to make use of, that is, fair and scriptural arguments, prayer, and a good life, surely they can have no authority for appointing and enforcing that which is directly contrary to it; I mean a fast, to pray for the success of

not fail to excite sentiments of gratitude in the breasts of every real christian. But to assume authority, to enforce it by carnal weapons, is a very different thing, and must prove in the end as unacceptable to God as the conduct of Uzza was when he put forth his hand to support, as he supposed, the ark of God in a tottering and dangerous state.

destructive

destructive arms, and often under the pretence of defending religion. A doctrine this altogether repugnant to the New Testament dispensation, and inimical to that time of reformation, which Paul has in view in his letter to the Hebrew church. The prayers of the first christians were never directed or put up to God for such an end; but rather that the time should be accomplished when men should learn war no more; when they should beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and when nation should not lift up sword against nation.—Isa. ii. 4. The consequence of which happy period will be, as in Micah iv. 4. “They shall sit every man
“under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none
“shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord
“hath spoken it.”

The nation of the Jews were permitted, under the Mosaic religion, it being adapted to worldly power and to the fleshly seed of Abraham, to go forth with destructive weapons against their enemies, for the purpose of defending the worship of the true God against the incursions of idolatry.

In the wilderness, during their journey to the promised land of rest, they were ordered of God occasionally to fight their way through the obstructing adversary, that they might obtain the promise made unto their fathers. But these wars are no precedents to christians; for in the shadowy dispensation of the
Jewish

Jewish church, they only prefigured the spiritual contests of christians against sin and satan, in order to their obtaining the spiritual and eternal blessings of the heavenly Canaan above. Hence an apostle contrasts the christian weapons with those used by the Jews: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds), casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.—2. Cor. x. 3, 4, 5,

These weapons are particularly described in Eph. chap. vi.; and are only to be used in the kingdom of God, which consists not in any thing sensual, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.—Rom. xiv. 17.

Opposed to this kingdom are all those who delight in war, whose origin is in the lust and carnality of men, according to apostolic decision.—James iv. 1, 2. And how applicable are his words in the 3d verse, to those christians who scruple not to join with those who appoint a day of supplication to God, for the success of carnal and destructive weapons: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

The fast of the Ninevites is, however, considered by some as an irrefragable proof, that christians ought

ought to obey a national fast by the king's appointment.

Their argument is this: "If God acknowledged a fast appointed by a heathen prince, surely we ought to obey the appointed fast of a christian king." But surely it is neither warrantable nor safe to determine the christian conduct by the dim light of the Old, whilst we enjoy the superior and meridian light of the New Testament, especially when the instance adverted to in the former, would involve a contradiction to the doctrines contained in the latter. This ancient fast, however, and those in modern times, are very dissimilar both in their end, circumstances, and effects. The fast of the Ninevites was not for the success of carnal weapons, but for the purpose of averting impending and certain judgments for their sins.—Secondly, The certain and immediate overthrow of that city was denounced by the Lord's prophet.—Thirdly, The people believed God, it is said, in consequence of which they proclaimed the fast; and the king, being under the same condemnation with the meanest of his subjects, gave his sanction to it.—Jonah iii. 5.

But does God now threaten to punish in this manner? If he does, surely all christians under such circumstances would both fast and pray, believing in God, whether it were regarded or not by the king. Surely it would have been justifiable in the Ninevites to have acted as they did, supposing the king had not believed the prophet. The civil powers can neither
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heighten nor diminish our obligations to obey God. For instance, the keeping of the Lord's day is sanctioned by our government, for which we ought to bless God, and gratefully acknowledge the countenance given to it by our rulers: yet christians meet on that day independent of this, and could not be restrained from it, were the civil authority to object to it, and that because they know it is the appointment of God. For the same reason, we therefore think that prayer and fasting, as solemn christian duties, stand unconnected with our obedience to civil government; and that the seasons for these holy exercises can only be regulated by a real christian church under the directions of Christ the only head. Nor do we think that a christian church ought to refuse fasting and prayer, at a time that a nation is engaged in it, merely on that account, if there are scriptural grounds for it; as in case of a plague, famine, or any other general and threatening calamity, which must at once strike a uniform conviction in every christian's mind of the necessity of such a duty.

We, however, meet with no fast of this nature in the New Testament. We hear of a general dearth which affected the christians in Judea, but no fast appointed on the occasion. All the fasts mentioned are either of a private, or have a relation to church matters. And, indeed, had there been any example of a political fast in the New Testament, it must have lead to political discussion and disputes among christians, a practice this altogether foreign to the nature of Christ's religion.

But

But further, it hath also been pleaded by some christians, that considering the king, or those in authority, as God's minister, or ministers, who are by the apostle (Rom. xiii. iv.) said not to bear the sword in vain, that it implies the lawfulness of christians praying that the arms of a nation may have effect upon a common enemy: which in case of an invasion may be admitted; but ought ever to be rejected on the common principles of going out to war. The apostle certainly did not mean then that the christians at Rome should pray for the extension of the imperial conquests! His ideas were not much enlarged in this way. He certainly rather means to exhort christians that they should be good and peaceable subjects in all civil matters, and that if they refused subjection to those in authority, they, as well as other men, ought to suffer under the sword of justice; otherwise, it would be in effect like bearing the sword in vain. The apostle had declared himself at all times ready to die, if any thing worthy of it could, by those in authority, be found in his civil conduct. He was not of the mind of some professed christians in after ages, who disgraced that holy name wherewith they were called, by imagining themselves delivered from the bonds of civil authority when they were made Christ's free servants.—No. He willingly subjected himself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. We therefore think, that by bearing not the sword in vain, the apostle means, that by it those in authority should maintain peace and good order at home.

Upon

Upon this principle christians may admit the propriety of maintaining a military force for the purpose of giving energy to law, quelling intestine broils and factions, and maintaining peace. Nor do we at present see it inconsistent in some cases, that christians should defend themselves against the violence of an enemy. It is true our Lord says, resist not evil; and if any smite thee on one cheek, turn to him the other. This is to be literally complied with when the evil comes upon us merely on the account of religion, or when we are smitten for the worthy name of Christ. But I do not see any evil in lifting up my hand to ward off a blow aimed at my head by a villain, who has nothing in view but to deprive me of life and obtain money. Not resisting evil has a particular reference to the old law of retaliation, which warranted the injured to return evil for evil, in an equal degree: but pure self-defence against violence offered to our body, or against unjust aspersions of our moral character, cannot well be construed into acts of retaliation, which the christian by all means is to avoid. Supposing a number of christians, along with other men, besieged by a common enemy, whose aim was plunder and despoil, would it not be the duty of the christians to assist their fellow subjects in repelling such a banditti? If this be not admitted, it unavoidably follows, that a christian, in such circumstances, ought tamely to give up his own, and the life of his nearest relatives, with every other thing most dear, into the hands of monsters in human

man shape, because that he will not resist evil ! Surely our Lord never taught such a doctrine ? No : on the contrary, he says, " if the good man of the house " had known in what watch the thief would come, " he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up."—Matt. xxiv.

43. In fine, if we are not allowed pure self-defence in civil matters, neither locks nor laws could be of any use to christians. If we think it any privilege to be protected, and if we approve of the conduct of those who protect us in our liberties, surely what we approve in others we may do ourselves, if necessary, though it should be a disagreeable service.

Fourth. To shew, that to dispute about and meddle with matters of politics is not consistent with the genius and spirit of christianity ; concluding with a few remarks from the whole.

By disputing about politics, I call that strictly criminal which extends to open contention and cavilling, which has little tendency but to alienate the affections of men from those in authority, and to divide subjects into private parties and factions. This, to me, is unworthy of a good subject, but intolerant in a christian.

By meddling with matters of politics we mean, the exercise of an anxious mind labouring to investigate politics, and to decide upon which and what is the best mode of governing. Some degree of this may be laudable in such as have influence and power to effect any thing in a lawful way for the good of mankind.

kind. But as real christians have in general no sort of authority or office in states, to spend much time on inquiries and investigations of this nature would be sinful.

I mean not, however, to say that christians should not form to themselves some opinion respecting governments, as resulting from solid, candid, and moderate inquiry; suited to their time, station in life, ability, and consistent with due subjection to civil authority. But we venture to say, that even when these subjects are, by christians, managed in the most peaceable and harmless way, if the heart discover much attachment to them, it will be a clear proof that the one thing needful, so much pressed in the gospel, is neglected, if not totally laid aside.

We have no examples, either in the conduct of our Lord or his apostles, in favour of political disputes, though certainly there were fair opportunities for it, had they been so disposed.

The question put to Jesus whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar, opened a very wide door to such inquiries, but without saying one word about Cæsar's government, either pro or con; he positively commands tribute to be paid to him. Nor did Jesus by this conduct court the applause or seek the favour and protection of the Roman government, either for himself or followers.—No: The doctrine he taught his first followers, guards his disciples in every age against seeking shelter from princes at the expence of truth, but enjoins them ever to remember to render

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unto

unto God the things that are God's, as well as to Cæsar the things that are his. To our Lord's chief apostle was also presented a very considerable opening for political discussion in the case and situation of the christian church at Rome, Cæsar's capital. In this however, as in other cases, he copied the conduct of his divine Master. He enters not into the merits of Nero's government, but positively enjoins that "Every soul be subject to the powers that be*."

It

* It appears from historic facts, that Paul had written his epistle in the beginning of Nero's reign, at which time this prince was remarked for the justness and gentleness of his administration till the beginning of the sixth year of his reign. Bishop Hoadly says, on the authority of bishop Pearson, that Paul's epistle was written in Nero's third year, consequently two years before his great change for the worse took place.

Diodati, a learned French divine, places it in the second year of his reign; and the common Bibles, which have the chronology, in Anno Do. 60, answering to the Roman history, which makes the commencement of his reign to be in the year of Christ 55—some 54; but from Paul's epistle to the Philippians, which was written from Rome when a prisoner under Nero in 64, it appears that the persecution against the christians had not then began, for there were christians in Nero's palace, see chap i. v. 13—and iv. 22. The change then that took place in Nero's mind, and which began to affect his government in the year 61, is a distinct thing from the time he commenced a christian persecutor, which was in 66, or the year after Paul had written to the Philippian church. Nero began it with first setting Rome on fire, and then charged it upon the christians; on which occasion it is probable that Paul

was

It is very natural to suppose that this injunction was in answer to some scruples that these christians had entertained, respecting their duty to heathen princes and to magistracy in general. It is universally allowed, that this church was composed of both Jews and Gentiles. If so, it would be no wonder in those days to hear a Jewish convert question the lawfulness of submitting to a government maintaining the worship of idols, and directed by an uncircumcised prince. Nor would it be surprising to hear a gentile convert, now delivered from the bondage of sin, and experiencing the liberty of the sons of God, query whether ungodly rulers were to be obeyed in the exercise of their official authority, or whether, being made the free servants of Christ, they were any longer under obligation to regard or revere civil magistracy. Both are however required to submit, upon one and the same principle, even for conscience sake. In the directions which this apostle gives to Titus the same doctrine is taught: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, and to be no brawlers." No contenders or disputants, the word means; which surely is here applicable to politics, and is much the same as if he had said, Teach the christians to avoid

was offered up or beheaded by his command. See 2 Tim. iv. 6.

N. B. I have added this note merely to justify the alterations made on this head, from the manner in which it stands in the first impression.

political contentions, and whatever is required of magistrates, that does not affect their conscience towards God, let it be done without dispute or objection. See chap. iii. 2.

This species of doctrine will be considered by many as sinking the dignity and felicity of man; but as christians we should recollect, that if the laws of Jesus are in many instances suited to sink our dignity in the view of worldly men, whilst we are here, yet in the end, they will be found as much calculated to exalt our nature in the world to come. The maxims and rules of Christ are of the same nature with the kingdom he came to establish, all spiritual and heavenly. It therefore strikes me, merely from analogy, that we are much more like the subjects of such a kingdom, when we are remarkable for peace, quietness, and at least moderation, in politics, than when, on the other hand, we are famous for disputes and heated wrangles on civil government.

As Jesus does not wish the princes of this world to rule or to assist him in ruling his church and people; so neither does he require his subjects to interfere with the dominions or governments of the kings of the earth. The services of christians, as busy bodies in politics, will prove as unacceptable to the Lord Jesus, as that of earthly monarchs, when they set up for defenders of his faith by the force of carnal weapons. Both parties are equally out of their proper sphere, and act equally inconsistent with their own principles. The religion of the Son of God,
which

which is purely spiritual, will not mix with a furious attachment to politics, in the affections of those who really receive it. They see, by the light of the gospel, that when their Lord and master came into the world, he made no attempts to alter or mould civil governments into a religious form, as many professed christians have since wished governments to be. His aim was to establish a kingdom of his own, perfectly different from all others, to be governed by laws purely divine, eternal in their duration, and absolutely perfect in nature. Hence those who took up the cross of Jesus to follow him were distinguished by their ardent desire for the interests of his spiritual kingdom. They were attentive to the voice of the Good Shepherd and Prince of Peace; "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," with this promise annexed, that all necessary temporal things should be added to them. See Matt. vi. 33. This precept and promise quieted their minds about temporal matters, and of course tended to cool any zeal that might arise in their minds after politics; the main objects of which are an inquiry how we shall be secured in the possession of the three great necessities of life mentioned in ver. 31 of this chapter. Their minds then being chiefly directed to spiritual objects and the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, political subjects lay very light on their minds, although they certainly wished to enjoy the privileges of good citizens as their right. But when these were denied

them, they endured their oppression with much patience, but made no attempts to relieve themselves or further their Lord's kingdom by means of civil broils.

“When Satan, like a great red dragon, made war against the saints by means of the Roman empire in its pagan state, they overcame him only by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, without intermeddling with civil affairs, or making use of any methods, which carnal policy might have dictated, to procure a government more favourable to their religious rights or liberties; they satisfied themselves with using such means as were competent to every one, in his own place and station, to further the spreading of the gospel; with enjoying among themselves, in secret when they durst not publicly, those privileges which belonged to them as christians; with observing the ordinances of Christ, and performing the duties which his law required towards one another, and towards all men. By these, and by a patient bearing of all their sufferings, they contributed more to the maintenance and propagation of their religion, than ever they could have done by any of those means that are employed in civil contests. And the men were at length ashamed, who falsely accused their good conversation in Christ *.”

* See essays by a dissenting minister from the church of Scotland. Page 34.

In contrast with the doctrine advanced under this head, and the maxim which we think ought to govern the general conduct of a christian, that is, not to meddle with matters of politics; it has been affirmed by a dissenting minister from the church of England, that such a maxim is the fashionable cant of the times, and is the offspring of the self-same spirit which charged our Lord with being the enemy of Cæsar, and the apostles with being pestilent fellows, sowers of sedition, and men who turned the world upside down. But I would seriously ask my worthy friend the author upon what grounds he asserts this? Does he indeed believe that Christ and his apostles were such bustlers in politics, as to afford a plausible ground to their adversaries for such a charge? I have thought hitherto, that our Lord was charged with not being Cæsar's friend, because he acknowledged himself to be the king of the Jews, not in a political, but in a religious sense. It was his open declaration, and his conduct constantly testified that his kingdom was not of this world. Upon what foundation then could such a charge be made but that of malice? And of the apostles too I have ever thought, that they were charged with being turners of the world upside down, merely because they preached Jesus and the resurrection, boldly condemning all idol worship. On this account only it was that Paul and his friends were said to act contrary to the decrees of Cæsar. See Acts xvii. 6, 7. It is true, they had said that there was another king, one Jesus, as in verse 7; but prejudice itself must surely acknowledge that

Paul and his brethren never uttered one syllable to signify that they wished Jesus to fill the place of Cæsar, or that Cæsar should form his government agreeable to the laws of Christ. How insipid the thought in comparison to the great object which Paul had in view, namely, to prove from the scriptures of the Old Testament, and by incontestable facts, that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead. What was the subject of his animated address to the Athenian philosophers and others from Mars-hill, the senate house of that city? Was it on some form of civil government, more conducive to the happiness of mankind, than had hitherto claimed the attention or struck the minds of those wise men? No; of infinitely greater concern to them, even to declare or make known the character of that God who made and upheld all things, whom as yet they were totally ignorant of; particularly in his having "appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead*." To prepare men for so awful a tribunal was the great business his soul was engaged in, and not the comparatively trifling concerns of civil government.

On a serious review then of this subject, I am still of opinion, that the maxim which Mr. Richards terms the fashionable cant, was the adopted rule of

* See Acts xvii. 22—33.

Jesus and his apostles, and ought to be so by all that would follow them in sincerity and truth. And so far is this cant phrase, not to meddle with matters of politics, from being the fashionable aphorism of the times, that in fact there are but very few indeed, comparatively, but what as heartily despise it as Mr. Richards. The high-church men are sticklers for church and state through thick and thin, a few excepted. The low-church men are most of them as active on the other hand, in their busy censures of governors and constitution at large, without discrimination, particularly those of our author's county*. They are scarcely found, except the Quakers, who conduct themselves in this matter according to the primitive example—in a peaceable deportment—in a meek and quiet spirit—in humble subjection to those in authority over us, and under the influence of that apostolic maxim, "Let your moderation be known unto all men, for the Lord is at hand."

CONCLUSION.

FROM the whole then of what has been said, let us be exhorted to be at peace with all men, and quiet under whatsoever government we are placed by the unerring hand of Providence. We are called upon to have our conversation in heaven, whence we look

* Norfolk. It becomes me here to say, that although I have made free to vindicate my opinion in objection to Mr. Richards's remark, yet I much approve of his pamphlet in general, as a proof that French atheism had not its origin from the late revolution in that country, but existed long before.

for the Saviour. In the passage here alluded to, the apostle reproves some professing christians, who in their conduct appeared to be enemies of Christ, who gloried in their shame, and minded earthly things; who probably contended more for their rights as citizens here, than for their privileges as christians belonging to a city above, whose maker and builder is God.—Phil. iii. 18, 19, 20.

Let us remember therefore, that it is in heaven where our interest chiefly is. There is our citizenship; and in the view of possessing it shortly will the main of our conversation be directed. We are called upon to set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth; and our Lord lays it down as a maxim, that if we are laying up treasures above, our hearts will be there also; in the same way as they who heap up treasures here have their hearts on earth. If then heaven be our chief banking house, our conversation will be much taken up about the security of our property there, and we shall find, to our comfort, that if once laid up in the sacred mansions above, they will remain inviolable from thieves and unhurt by the moth.

We are pilgrims in this world, as all our forefathers were; and we, like them, seek a country above. It does not suit well with the idea of a pilgrim, when passing through a strange country, to retard his journey by stopping to dispute and settle the manners and laws of a country to which he means not to return. But how inadequate are christians for such

a task! It is no easy matter to attain such a knowledge of politics as will warrant us to say what is the best mode of ruling mankind. In the pursuit of such an inquiry the whole of a christian's life might be spent ere he could know how to decide for the best; and perhaps, after all, be left in total perplexity about it. We ought rather to admire the more excellent way which Jesus has taught us, which leaves no room for doubt, by making it our positive duty to obey every kind of government, without exceptions to the characters of those who rule, so long as they are forbore with by other men. Here perplexity is at an end, and we are led to admire the wisdom of Christ in establishing a rule of obedience, so suitable to christians in every age, and in every country where they may dwell on the earth; so that we may conceive of christians in various nations, all harmoniously sending up their petitions to God for their kings and governors, and for the good of their respective countries, though the governments of each may be totally different to each other. This way not only suits the age and the country we live in, but also the meanest of capacities in the christian profession. The way-faring man, though a fool as to politics, need not err in it: for surely any of us can understand, when it is affirmed that there are no powers, or governments*,

* The word ἐξουσία, *power*, is sometimes so translated by critics, and in this sense it is used in Luke xx. 20—xxiii. 7.

but

but what are of God, and that every soul must be subject to them; while, on the other hand, the wisest could scarcely affirm with a safe conscience what is the best mode of government.

We ought also to know that the end of government is for the good of mankind; and though we may not always be blest with what we may conceive to be the best form of it, yet we are sure, that without some kind of government we could not long exist in the world. The worst of governments are better than none; and there are scarcely any so bad but what are productive of some real benefit to those who live under them. Let us beware of a spirit that would lead us to rebel against the higher powers on earth: the same spirit would in the end lead us to fight against the armies of heaven, and defy the Almighty. The angels that first sinned, did not like to be in subjection to the higher powers of heaven. The idea of being governed did not suit these ambitious spirits, although they were under the most perfectly wise and just rule of God. They desired to govern themselves, therefore God cast them down to hell, and delivered them unto chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment.—2 Peter ii. 4.

From this dreadful source of ambition and rebellion we see a stream of it running through every age, and infecting every condition and relation of men. By the influence of this spirit Korah and his company rebelled

rebelled against the government of Moses; and at length the children of Israel, through its baneful influence, did not like God to reign over them. As children, how naturally are we averse to submit to the government of parents! Their kindly restraints upon us are considered as intolerable yokes of bondage: yes, in every relation of life where subjection is enjoined, the natural emotions of our wicked hearts rise up against it.

As men and christians, we indeed cannot but think of the difference between the good and evil existing in courts. We ought neither to be rebels nor parasites. Therefore we cannot approve of the evil because committed by those in authority. In some cases it may be our duty seasonably to reprove such, but to attempt to reform by violence is no part of the christian conduct. Kings and magistrates must be accountable for their own immoral conduct to him who is higher than the highest, and who will reward the iniquity of princes by the same scales of impartial justice as those by which the peasant and the beggar are weighed.—And

Whilst others are actively engaged in finding out the corruptions of government, let it be our serious business to find out the secret and hidden springs of corruption yet remaining in ourselves, that we may be more competent judges of the faults of others. And in the midst of heavy complaints about taxations, let us be thankful that we have wherewith to pay them.

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Let us reflect with grateful acknowledgments God for the invaluable privileges of the present time under the present government, by which we are protected in our religious liberties to a considerable degree, though not to all the length that might be expected and wished for ; yet, in comparison with former times and to other modern nations, we shall find our obligation to honour the king greatly enhanced.



THE END.

